

STATE OF UTAH  DIVISION OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES  WILDLIFE	NO. W5WLD-2	NO. PAGES 4
	EFFECTIVE DATE: March 31, 2005	
	APPROVED Approved by Wildlife Board, March 31, 2005	
SUBJECT: EMERGENCY BIG GAME WINTER FEEDING		
DISTRIBUTION: ALL DIVISION EMPLOYEES		

## **I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to establish the procedure and guidelines for emergency supplemental winter feeding of big game. The intent of this policy is to provide emergency feed for big game animals only during those periods of critical stress and not as a sustaining program that would carry larger game populations than the range can normally support.

## **II. POLICY**

Continual supplemental winter feeding of big game is not a part of the Division's routine management program because we recognize that in most cases big game populations should be maintained under natural conditions and by natural available forage. However, the Division also realizes that there are times when unusual weather conditions can create critical times of stress when winter forage becomes extremely limited, unavailable, or animals are forced into areas threatening public safety. Furthermore, we recognize that by providing the proper feed, only during these times of critical stress, the Division may improve the survival of those animals that may have otherwise succumbed to starvation.

The implementation of widespread feeding, which supports higher population levels than healthy habitat can sustain, is not only prohibitively expensive, but involves serious risks in terms of disease and habitat degradation (see Attachment). Under certain circumstances, supplemental winter feeding can be used as a tool to help accomplish the following, especially in the short-term:

1. control big game (primarily elk and deer) damage in agricultural areas, e.g. dairies, feed lots, orchards, until a better long-term solution can be sought;
2. promote public safety by drawing animals away from highways and urban areas;
3. maintain parent stocks of big game populations; and
4. relieve stress on populations in short-term severe emergencies.

Division feeding programs will be instituted only after specific recommendations of the Wildlife Section Chief, with final approval from the Director. Authorization for feeding will occur on a site-by-site basis only.

The Division will not participate in any emergency big game feeding program that occurs within the known range or use area of any big game population where chronic wasting disease, brucellosis or tuberculosis has been detected.

### **III. PROCEDURES**

#### **A. Approval Procedure**

Emergency Division feeding programs will be allowed only in accordance with a feeding proposal prepared by the region, reviewed by the Wildlife Section Chief, and approved by the Director. Generally, the feeding program will be confined to those situations described in the previous section.

#### **B. Feeding Proposal**

A feeding proposal must address the following issues:

1. Why feeding is necessary (emergency /unusual circumstances).
2. Number of animals and length of time.
3. Estimated cost.
4. Type of feed to be used (weed-free material is required).
5. Whether the proposed emergency feeding areas are within the known range or use area of any deer or elk population where chronic wasting disease, brucellosis, or tuberculosis has been detected.
6. Desired benefits.
7. Extent of monitoring.
8. Description of outreach actions to be taken to explain to public what is being done, why, and planned future actions.
9. Future actions to prevent the feeding need from recurring, e.g. hunts, fencing, habitat improvement projects, etc.

#### **C. Division Discourages Private Feeding Programs**

The Division strongly discourages private individuals and/or organizations from entering into feeding programs, except in extreme emergencies. In such emergencies, the public will be asked to join with the Division in emergency feeding. It may become necessary to obtain authority from the

Wildlife Board to regulate private feeding programs that are negatively impacting big game populations.

**D. Funding**

The availability of funding will be a determining factor in approving emergency feeding programs. In the event of any extensive feeding initiative, funding for big game emergency winter feeding programs will, of a necessity, be sought outside the standard Division budget.

**IV. REVISION DATE**

This policy shall be reviewed on or before March 31, 2010.

**Additional Information**

For more information along with a significant scientific literature summary please refer to:

deVos, J.C., M.R. Conover, and N.E. Headrick. 2003. Mule deer conservation: Issues and management strategies. Jack H. Berryman Institute Press. Logan, UT.

AFeeding Wildlife...Just Say No@. 2000. A Wildlife Management Institute Publication. *Contact: WMI Publications, P.O. Box 34646, Washington, D.C. 20043 Telephone: (202) 371-1808*

WAFWA, 2003. Mule deer - changing landscapes, changing perspectives. WAFWA mule deer working group.

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## Winter Feeding Policy Attachment

Winter feeding is not the simple act of kindness that many perceive it to be, and in fact, can be a great detriment to the welfare of Utah's big game herds if not considered carefully.

Health problems associated with animals concentrating in feeding areas include higher incidences of eye and respiratory infections. Infection rates of chronic wasting disease and brucellosis have also been shown to be higher in artificially fed populations of deer and elk. Reproduction in some herds that are fed every winter; such as the Jackson, Wyoming elk herd, is dramatically lower than Utah's herds-at least partly due to communicable disease.

Range damage occurs in areas around feeding sites because animals continue to eat other forages even when they are being fed. Where this feeding occurs every year, natural winter forage is often overused and may never recover.

Depredation on nearby private lands can be caused or intensified by establishing feeding sites since animals concentrate and usually increase each year.

Intense competition for food in limited space at feeding sites often causes higher death rates for fawns and calves than under more natural dispersed conditions.

Expense is extremely high in feeding programs in comparison to the relatively few animals it may help. For example, the cost to feed alfalfa pellets to one deer for 60 days would be approximately \$45 at 2005 prices. The labor and equipment to distribute the feed could exceed the cost of the feed. The costs to feed elk are approximately double the costs for deer.

Why private citizens are discouraged to feedB

The Division generally discourages private citizens from feeding big game to avoid causing increased problems for deer. For instance, it is known that a steady diet of certain types of feed may actually cause harm to deer. Also, once a feeding program is begun, animals must be fed until they are ready to move back to natural forage.

Keeping big game wild-

Supplemental feeding can create significant behavior alterations like disruption or abandonment of long-term migration patterns. And though nature may seem cruel, it is perfectly normal for 10-15 percent of deer and elk to not survive a mild winter; more die during a harsh winter. Animals ill-equipped to survive succumb to starvation, accidents, predators, exposure, disease, or parasites. Feeding may save a few from starvation but does little or nothing to halt losses from other causes.